

Interdisciplinary Learning

Back in 1899, John Dewey wrote, "Relate the school to life, and all studies are of necessity correlated."¹ Over 100 years ago, Dewey was perhaps ahead of his time in understanding the value of [interdisciplinary](#) approaches. In the interconnected 21st century, though, we know that we must draw on multiple knowledge domains to find solutions for many of today's problems. This ability to span multiple domain boundaries is highly valued in the today's competitive workplace. Harvard Business School professor Dorothy Barton Leonard has found that people with "Tshaped skills," that is, those who speak two or more "professional languages" and can "see the world from two or more different perspectives" have the cognitive diversity needed to formulate innovative solutions to complex problems.²

Many argue that dividing the school day into separate subjects or "silos of learning" does not fit the brain's innate attempt to construct meaning particularly for young children and those without a deep understanding of the subject already. Examples of interdisciplinary curriculum include broad themes such as environment, service learning experiences, and the [Microsociety](#) program. In each of these, students are involved in several disciplines such as reading, writing, research, speaking, science, math, and sociology.

1. Dewey, J. (1980). *The School and Society*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
2. Leonard, D. B. (1998). *The Wellsprings of Knowledge: Building and Sustaining the Sources of Innovation*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.